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New York

President: Mr. Kerim ..... (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Mavroyiannis (Cyprus), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 6 p.m.

Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting Devoted to the Follow-up to the Outcome of the Special Session on Children

Agenda item 66 (*continued*)

Promotion and protection of the rights of children

(b) Follow-up to the outcome of the special session on children

Report of the Secretary-General (A/62/259)

Draft resolution (A/62/L.31)

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Hendrik Setrowidjojo, Minister of Social Affairs and Housing of Suriname.

Mr. Setrowidjojo (Suriname): The Government of Suriname would like to express its sympathy to the Government and people of Algeria and the United Nations family on the tragedy that took place today in Algeria.

My delegation is honoured to address the General Assembly at this special occasion, at which the international community reviews progress made towards achieving the goals set out in the Declaration and Plan of Action entitled "A world fit for children", adopted at the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly in 2002.

We express our gratitude to the President of the General Assembly for the preparations for this meeting, and we also wish to extend gratitude to the United Nations system for its valuable support in assuring that this meeting becomes a success.

I would like to associate myself with the statement delivered by the representative of the Bahamas speaking on behalf of the members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

In 2002, all participating countries committed themselves to realizing the goals set forth in the outcome document of the special session for children. That commitment was necessary in order to guarantee that children have a stable environment in which their capabilities are evolved and stimulated into full development.

We have now arrived at the critical juncture at which, five years later we are to review the progress that has been made. The Government of Suriname, aware of the fact that children are the future of humanity, has dedicated the past five years to revising, formulating and implementing policies and programmes for children. That process was conducted in close cooperation with non-governmental organizations and international donors working for and with children, as well as with UNICEF and other United Nations agencies. Specific policy interventions have been formulated in the areas of health, education, legal protection, people with disabilities, HIV/AIDS, prevention of mother-to-child transmission, early

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childhood development and sexual and reproductive health.

Please allow me to inform the Assembly on the modest achievements made in areas affecting the well-being and rights of children in Suriname.

The immunization coverage increased from 70 per cent in 2000 to 85 per cent in 2004. In 2005, a new immunization scheme, including Hib and hepatitis B vaccine, was introduced. Infant mortality remained stable during the period 2000-2004 at around 20 per 1,000 live births. Enrolment in preschool and primary school increased, and the latter programme was seen to completion. Yet a significant challenge remains the fact that there has been a decrease in the percentage of children completing secondary education.

Other achievements concern the improvement of the birth registration system and the provision of primary and secondary health care to disadvantaged groups in our society, such as people with low income and older persons, almost free of charge. We have, furthermore, registered gains in the fight against malaria, which resulted in a decrease in the number of malaria cases by 75 per cent in 2006.

It is also noteworthy to mention legislative reforms, particularly in relation to children's right to develop parental relations with both parents in case of divorce; yet to be approved is legislation with regard to the rights of children to be consulted in matters that are of importance to them.

Children and young people have also been involved in exercising their right to participation. In that context, a youth parliament was instituted, providing a forum for young people to discuss issues that are of concern to them. There is also a national advisory board in which two CARICOM youth ambassadors are represented. The Government further executed a multiple indicators cluster survey in 2006, which will result in the availability of important data on the situation of children.

Notwithstanding the progress made, we have to be cognizant of the fact that much more remains to be done to fulfil the lofty promises made to children and truly build a world fit for them. As long as children are deprived of basic education and health care, and as long as children are living in poverty and continue to suffer from violence and abuse committed by those who are supposed to protect them, we will still have a long way to go.

In that regard, it is of crucial importance to scale up resources to improve the situation of children worldwide, as well as to increase capacity-building, especially in developing countries. Of equal importance is enhanced international cooperation to complement national initiatives and the forging of true partnerships.

In closing, let me stress that it is time to transform our words into actions. The declaration that will be adopted at the closing of tomorrow's meeting should inspire us more than ever to redouble our efforts to create a world truly fit for children. We can ill afford to fail our future generations.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Kandeh Musa, Minister of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs of Sierra Leone.

Ms. Musa (Sierra Leone): As a member of the African Union, Sierra Leone associates itself with the statement delivered by the Minister of Women's and Children's Affairs of Ghana, presenting the Call for Accelerated Action on the Implementation of the Plan of Action towards Africa Fit for Children, as mandated by the Second Pan-African Forum on Children held in Cairo, Egypt, from 29 October to 2 November 2007.

As we meet with the global fraternity of nations in this commemorative plenary of the General Assembly to evaluate the progress achieved thus far in the implementation of the Declaration and Plan of Action of "A world fit for children", Sierra Leone is pleased to note that so much has been achieved by individual nations and organizations towards to the advancement and welfare of children, evident in the words of the draft declaration, which my delegation hopes will be adopted by consensus at the end of this meeting.

Our strong commitment to the welfare of children is demonstrated by the fact that Sierra Leone is a State party to all the relevant international human rights instruments dedicated to the promotion and protection of the rights and welfare of children, including the Declaration and Plan of Action of "A world fit for children".

Children's concerns have been mainstreamed into our national development policies, programmes and

plans, as underlined by the creation of a special Ministry of Children's Affairs, which I have the privilege to head as Minister. Children's concerns are also addressed in our national poverty reduction strategy paper. Consistent with these commitments, Sierra Leone has taken and continues to take practical measures towards the promotion of the rights and welfare of children, especially in relation to the four outcome areas of "A world fit for children" plan of action, namely: health, education, protection against abuse, exploitation and violence, as well as combating HIV/AIDS.

In our bid to attain the objective of promoting healthy lives for the children of Sierra Leone, the right of every child to enjoy the highest attainable standard of health has been a major priority for my Government. In this regard, we have taken initiatives, all of which are consistent with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of reducing by half the proportion of people living without sustainable safe drinking water by 2015 and reducing infant mortality. There are extensive programmes to enhance maternal health and reduce infant mortality and morbidity rates including immunizations, family planning, obstetric care and training of traditional birth attendants.

Under the Roll Back Malaria Programme, we have embarked upon a massive malaria control campaign, which has benefited from generous funding and technical support from United Nations agencies, particularly UNICEF and other international funding operations. Through this programme, about 900,000 insecticide treated mosquito nets have been distributed to pregnant women and children under 5 years of age.

In the area of providing quality education, a premium has been placed on having every child attend school. The Government has introduced free and compulsory primary education and created special incentives for promoting the education of the girl child. This has led to significantly higher primary school enrolment, particularly the enrolment of girls at all levels. We have also modified some of our national education programmes to provide opportunities for war-affected children aged 10 to 15 whose schooling was disrupted or who never attended school.

Through a programme known as Complementary Rapid Education for Primary School, the normal six-year primary education programme was compressed to three years in a bid to encourage beneficiaries to eventually join the formal education system. About 23,000 children have successfully gone through the programme and integrated into the formal education system thanks to UNICEF.

With regard to the issue of protecting children against abuse, exploitation and violence, a number of practical measures have been taken to address vulnerabilities of specific categories of children. A National Commission for War-Affected Children was established soon after our civil war to focus on the needs of children, including reunification with their families, fostering and trauma healing. The Government also adopted a declaration by which 18 years became the minimum age for recruitment into the national army. A Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established to provide, among other things, a forum for children associated with the war to tell their stories during the hearings of the Commission. Details of these stories provided a wealth of information about children and their vulnerabilities. These stories have also contributed to shaping our policies on children's welfare. The recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report, especially those related to the protection of the rights and advancement of the welfare of children, are now being implemented.

On the subject of employment law, it is now prohibited for women and girls of any age to work in mines and also for children under 18 years of age to be employed at night in any private or public undertaking. The law also prohibits male children below age 16 from working underground in mines.

In June 2007, a child rights bill was enacted in Sierra Leone to ensure the proper implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Concurrently, the Government is working with various child protection civil society organizations, religious bodies and UNICEF to support programmes to take children off the streets, especially child peddlers. A head count of street children in major urban areas estimates the number at 2,874. This demonstrates that there is a lot more to be done.

Also established are a well-functioning Child Protection Committee headed by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, and child friendly centres established by the National Commission for War Affected Children and religious

organizations in various parts of the country to take care of vulnerable children.

To further address the needs of our children, a Trafficking in Persons Act was enacted in 2005 and a Trafficking in Persons Task Force, and a National Orphans and Vulnerable Children Task Force were established. We have also set up a Family Support Unit in the Police Department to protect children against sexual abuse and exploitation. There are about 18 Family Support Unit branches around the country. Social workers from the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs have been assigned to branches of the Unit nationwide.

In the area of combating HIV/AIDS, we have taken measures to ensure that our children are protected against that monstrous scourge. We have thus developed policies and guidelines such as support for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV as well as paediatric care.

In spite of all the gains I have described, we must still express our concern that the condition of the children of Sierra Leone remains precarious. If we should meet all the targets set out in the "A world fit for children" declaration and plan of action, we have yet to address such challenges as special care for children orphaned by AIDS, the increasing number of street children, inadequate health and education facilities for children in remote communities and poor infrastructure, as well as the lack of trained personnel to tackle the problem of trafficking in persons.

Much as our success in achieving "A world fit for children" targets depends to a very large extent on our national efforts, there is still need for continued international support specifically to help us meet the Millennium Development Goals, which have a great bearing on the welfare of children.

In conclusion, allow me, on behalf of my President, His Excellency Mr. Ernest Bai Koroma, the Government and the people of Sierra Leone, to thank the United Nations, especially UNICEF, for bringing us all together in this high level plenary meeting. I must also thank our development partners for their continued support to ensure we fulfil our commitments as enunciated in the "A world fit for children" declaration and plan of action, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its optional protocols.

Finally, we reiterate our firm commitment to the ongoing global efforts at making a world fit, not only for the children of Sierra Leone but also a world fit for children the world over.

Sierra Leone joins nations here in expressing condolences to the Government and the people of Algeria in the wake of today's tragedy.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Cecilia Landereche Gómez Morín, Director, National System for Integral Development of the Family of Mexico.

Ms. Landereche Gómez Morín (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): Before beginning my statement, I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for the help Mexico received when, less than two months ago, my country suffered one of its worse natural catastrophes in the States of Tabasco and Chiapas. On behalf of the people of Mexico, I would like to express my thanks for the generous assistance that we have received and continue to receive from different parts of the world, as well as for the extraordinary support given by the United Nations. Mexico acknowledges the expressions of solidarity in these difficult times, and similarly we would also like to declare our solidarity with Algeria after the serious attacks that occurred this morning.

Mexico's experience following the adoption the document "A world fit for children" led to the development of a national programme entitled "A Mexico fit for children and adolescents". With this plan of action, the Mexican Government took up the 21 goals agreed upon at that Assembly and adapted them to the needs and specificities of our country.

In order to discuss the achievements of the last few years and the challenges for the future, it is important to understand that Mexico is a multicultural mosaic: more than 70 indigenous languages are spoken there, and more than 7 million people use them on a daily basis. The indigenous populations have their own usages and customs; some designate their own authorities in accordance with their cosmic vision. The federal Government respects their forms of social and political organization.

This cultural wealth requires a comprehensive vision in the design and implementation of public policies. For many years now, the Government of Mexico has tackled problems relating to children with

programmes that are adapted to all the social categories and populations that make up our country.

As part of our free education programme for the school year 2007-2008, we distributed 250 million textbooks cost-free and published almost 150 titles in more than 50 indigenous languages for more than 600,000 students who receive primary education in their mother tongue.

In the area of nutrition, the programme of school breakfasts, which began almost 80 years ago, is a fundamental strategy of nutritional support for proper learning. On a daily basis, we serve more than 5 million breakfasts to our children with the participation of municipalities, schools and parents.

For the Mexican Government, the basis of all our efforts in the area of children is the family, which is why we are trying to combat vulnerability with programmes that begin and end in the family. Thus, we have streamlined adoption processes in the belief that one of the most important prevention strategies is to ensure that all children can live within a family. We have promoted actions at the level of the federal Government, in cooperation with other Government authorities, to guarantee that adoption serves the interests of the child. In other words, we seek a family for a child, not a child for a family.

We recognize the need to improve the conditions of the growing number of working mothers and their children. Since the inauguration of the new Government in December 2006, we have already opened 5,000 childcare centres that serve 100,000 boys and girls. We have also invested resources to enhance the quality of the centres that already existed. Thanks to them, many families have managed to overcome their hereditary levels of poverty. Boys and girls also receive attention, including before preschool age, and thus have a future with more opportunities for development.

In the area of health, one of the most important policies this year has been "Health insurance for a new generation", a programme aimed at providing health services to all newborns as of 1 December 2006 whose families do not have social security coverage.

More specifically, I would like to emphasize the establishment of the National Council for Children and Adolescents, which follows up on the national goals of the Programme of Action 2002-2010 and works in coordination with the main public, private and social actors, as well as with children and youth. The Council currently publishing a report on the progress Mexico has achieved in each of 21 target areas.

According to the latest assessment published by the National Council in 2006 in the area of protection against all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation, Mexico has established some 30 programmes that have provided excellent results. For example, child labour has been reduced by 25.3 per cent compared to the year 2000 and the number of children who attend school has increased by 40.9 per cent. The prevalence of HIV/AIDS among young people between the ages of 15 and 24 has also declined substantially, with a reduction of 33 per cent between 2000 and 2005.

However, in the area of education and health, there are still certain challenges. From the year 2000, we only reduced to 23 per cent the rates of malnutrition among children under the age of 5. Although we increased preschool coverage from 75.7 per cent to 99.7 per cent, we have only managed to increase school enrolment by 0.4 per cent. Unfortunately, many of our children do not complete their primary education.

We still have problems in the area of maternal and infant mortality. From 1990 to 2000, we managed a reduction from 89 out of 1,000 live births to 18.2 out of 1,000 live births. But our goal for the year 2010 is to reach 12 per 1,000 live births, though so far we have only managed a reduction to 16.2 per 1,000 live births.

Generally speaking, we can say that Mexico is on the right track. We have a system of indicators that makes it possible to continuously assess the impact of our programmes. Currently, we have only three areas of difficulty and three indicating that we must procede cautiously. However, for the 15 remaining goals, there appears to be no obstacles to success. We are sure that we can reach them by 2010.

To conclude, I would like to bring to the Assembly's consideration a topic that is extremely important for the delegation of Mexico and which, in our opinion, should play a central role in the international agenda of "A world fit for children". I am referring to the inclusion of the media. As the most important disseminators of culture, they accompany our daily lives, especially the lives of children. The delegation of Mexico sees the media as crucial instruments in the promotion among our new

generations of respect for human rights, peace and the care of the environment.

There is no doubt, as always, that pooling our efforts and our will in forums such as this will be crucial for the commitment to building a world fit for children.

The Acting President: The next speaker is Her Excellency Ms. Nouara Saadia Djaafar, Minister Delegate in charge of Family and Female Condition of Algeria.

(*spoke in French*)

Before I give Ms. Djaafar the floor, I would like to convey to her and through her to the Government and the people of Algeria the deepest sadness and pain felt by the members of the General Assembly over the terrible event that has taken place in her country following the explosions in Algiers this morning and for the tragic victims of this event. I would ask her to accept our most sincere condolences and our deepest sympathy.

Ms. Djaafar (Algeria) (*spoke in Arabic*): First of all, I am honoured to express my deepest thanks to the Acting President and to all those who have conveyed their condolences and expressed their solidarity and their sympathy with the Algerian people following the cowardly terrorist attack that took place so brutally in my country today.

The special session of 2002 conducted an in-depth evaluation of the previous period, and we were able to establish clear-cut objectives on the basis of that evaluation. Today, we are conducting a follow-up to the outcome of that special session. First, we should focus on the brilliant consensus achieved on behalf of children throughout the world which has allowed for a better understanding of issues involving them and include them in ongoing international activities, such as combating poverty and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The consensus has also enabled us to undertake international action in specific areas pertaining to children, such as violence against children worldwide. An important study on the subject provided us the opportunity to get a better idea of certain phenomena involving the protection of children in various regions of the world and to continue efforts to mobilize our potential on a global basis. We hope that these initiatives will continue.

We are acting with and on behalf of children; attempting to ensure concrete results for them and to achieve a world fit for children in our countries. Allow me briefly to provide Member States with an idea of what my country has done in this area, since today we are here to evaluate the activities of nations on behalf of children.

Children in Algeria have seen progress in several areas since 2000. Various integrated development programmes since 2000 have involved 2001-2004 economic rehabilitation efforts and a similar programme for the period 2005-2009. We are acting to ensure equality for all citizens in all regions. We have established two additional programmes for children, one for our southern provinces and the other for the higher plateau regions. These wide-scale programmes have created an environment which encouraged improvement in people's lives and elaborated infrastructures and services for development, modernized technology and established a new economic and social dynamism in the country.

Algeria has adopted a decisive strategy to put an end to foreign indebtedness and to fight unemployment in order to enhance development. We have also established special pioneering programmes to strengthen needy families and combat poverty throughout various regions to consolidate investment projects for small and medium-sized enterprises and establish national programmes for rural and agricultural development. All these programmes and strategies have enabled us to ensure a greater availability of resources to achieve social and economic objectives for children and their families. These are important activities which relate to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, especially in the area of education.

We have achieved progress towards establishing partnerships for children by strengthening common action for children's education and establishing linkages with civil society, the mass media and parliamentarians. The next stage is to involve the private sector, with the help of international organizations such as UNICEF. When we strive for such accomplishments for children, we act at the appropriate level in order to address their concerns and we have been able to appreciate the serious-mindedness of this initiative through all the activities we have conducted nationally for children.

Within the framework of such a positive environment, we have introduced new activities for children through sectoral programmes, including health, reproductive health, improvement of health services for children and their families, and strengthening mother and child protection programmes. We also have programmes to combat child maternal mortality through national programmes that are both prenatal and postnatal in nature, as well as activities to improve education, including the introduction of reforms in the education system, in curricula and methods of teaching and in caring for younger children and their social lives.

In Algeria, there are about 8 million children, aged 6 to 16, attending school. We have a strong legal system to protect children, which has developed gradually since our first years of independence and has strengthened as part of the comprehensive reform of the justice system adopted by our country. We have elaborated a draft law for the protection of children which was approved by the Government which strengthens already existing protection.

Algeria has established a national strategy to combat violence against children as part of a study undertaken by the United Nations Secretary-General to combat violence against children throughout the world. In this regard, a national plan for children to achieve a new Algeria fit for children was carried out with the assistance of all ministerial sectors and national organizations working with children, community organizations and the mass media. Children themselves, especially young adults, have also been involved with the development of national priorities on the subject of children within a period that extends to the year 2015.

The period for activities set out in "A world fit for children" compels us to learn lessons for the future, and our State commits itself to promote the rights of the child, with the participation of all influential elements of society dealing effectively with children. This is a key commitment of our Government to ensure security, protection and basic services such as education, health, safe environment and extracurricular activities to bring up a child properly. This is part of our national development strategy. We cannot achieve proper childhood in a needy environment. We are acting to meet our commitments to children as part of the MDGs, and we should renew such commitments to children who are experiencing difficult conditions, especially those in Africa.

Acting for children requires that we work with children and that we begin to apply the principle of participation from the outset. This is a consensual horizontal action in which all stakeholders participate. It requires that we find an appropriate framework for constant action. Action on behalf of children is something that is forward-looking; it involves the family, its stability and the protection of the family unit. We will continue to act to consolidate the family and its stability, and to ensure the necessary resources for the growth of children, thus enabling families to carry out their basic mission as the essential element of society.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Shahida Jamil, Federal Minister for Women, Development, Social Welfare and Special Education of Pakistan.

Ms. Jamil (Pakistan): At the outset, let me express my felicitations to the President of the General Assembly on successfully convening this Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting Devoted to the Follow-up to the Outcome of the Special Session on Children. I also take this opportunity to welcome the launch of the Secretary-General's report on progress towards the goals of the final document, entitled "A world fit for children".

The report provides a comprehensive review of the progress made during the past five years in four priority areas of the final document: reducing child and maternal mortality and malnutrition; ensuring universal primary education; protecting children against abuse, exploitation and violence; and combating HIV/AIDS.

Since the World Summit for Children in 1990, followed by the twenty-seventh special session on children in 2002, the international community has come a long way in strengthening its commitments to children. More children are now getting proper education, health facilities, nutrition, drinking water, sanitation, shelter and care.

The full realization of our commitments to promoting and protecting children's rights, however, is still far from being achieved. Challenges of inequality, poverty, discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity, race or religion, majority against minority, and migrant children still persist. Children and

adolescents affected by natural disasters, living under foreign occupation, or facing internal or external displacement are deprived of their childhood and particularly vulnerable to violence, sexual exploitation, HIV infection, forced labour and slavery.

There is growing evidence that children are victimized by violence in their homes, schools, workplaces and communities the world over. The violation of child rights has serious and life-long repercussions. The problem is pervasive and its presence is spread across geographical, cultural, religious and socioeconomic boundaries. Ignorance and denial of violence against children have perpetuated that abuse and protected the perpetrators.

In order to translate the goals of the World Summit for Children into reality, a national programme of action was developed by the Government of Pakistan in 1990s and later reviewed before the General Assembly's special session on children in 2002. Now the Government of Pakistan is preparing, with the cooperation of UNICEF, a national child policy and plan of action for the next decade through a consultative and participatory process of all key stakeholders. Similar plans are also under preparation at the provincial, regional and district levels.

The right to education of the child is one of the priority areas for Pakistan. With continued emphasis on education by successive Governments, the net enrolment rate for primary schools increased to 52 per cent in 2005-2006, as compared to 42 per cent in 2001-2002. The Government has recently accorded approval to an education-sector reform strategy to address quality education for children. Special education for special children is an emerging subject in Pakistan, and 49 special education centres have been established in the main cities.

Pakistan has been particularly cognizant of the fact that children are more vulnerable to the phenomenon of violence. One of the major developments in that regard is the preparation of a national plan of action to combat child abuse and sexual exploitation, in line with the Stockholm Declaration and Plan of Action. In July 2006 in Islamabad, Pakistan also hosted the first meeting of the South Asia Forum for ending violence against children, which resulted in the adoption of a South Asian regional strategy to combat the sexual abuse of children in South Asian countries.

At the domestic level, a national child protection bill is being prepared to address all issues of child protection, violence and sexual abuse in a more comprehensive manner. A study for reviewing national laws to prevent and control child and women trafficking is also under way. It will help in combating the menace of the traffic in children and women who are trafficked for the purposes of prostitution, child labour, the begging and organ trades, slavery or bonded labour.

Our primary duty towards children to ensure their healthy survival cannot be overemphasized. In the area of child health, Pakistan is fully aware of the extraordinary burden of preventable deaths and morbidity among women and children, and is fully committed to improving their health status. Pakistan stands in the list of those few developing countries that have mainstreamed non-communicable diseases and injuries in their public health agendas.

Maternal and child health is a very crucial component of our national health policy and the Millennium Development Goals. In that context, the Ministry of Health has planned a major maternal and child health programme. A strategic plan on maternal and child health, amounting to 19.5 billion rupees, was launched in 2006 with the targets of reducing the under-five mortality rate to less than 65 per 1,000 live births and the newborn mortality rate to less than 40 per 1,000 live births by the year 2011.

Recent research has proved that marriage and family are irreplaceable institutions and that men, women and children achieve the greatest happiness, health and well-being in stable and intact families. The Convention on the Rights of the Child establishes the responsibility of both parents and the whole family for the well-being and care of the child. Unfortunately, millions of children around the world are growing up without one or both of their parents due to poverty, disability, disease, natural disasters, family breakdown and divorce. The welfare of children and the institution of the family are accorded a special place in Pakistan's State policies and Constitution, as children have always been the focus of our attention.

Finally, I hope that, by gathering at this High-level Meeting, we have once again reaffirmed, strengthened and voiced more forcibly the call of all children. We should pay greater attention and minimize the grievances of all children in all situations,

including those facing violence, sexual abuse, war, conflicts, natural disasters, internal displacement and prolonged foreign occupation. I hope that we join the global voice for a real and qualitative change in the lives of children, irrespective of their cast, creed, religion and gender. It is only in that way that, together, we can make certain that this becomes a world fit for children together.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Wang Shuxian, Executive Deputy Director of the National Working Committee on Children and Women of China.

Ms. Wang Shuxian (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): At the outset, I wish to express our sympathy, concern and condolences to the victims of the bombings in Algeria.

Today, representatives of various countries are gathered here to review the progress over the past five years in fulfilling the goals set out in the outcome document of the special session of the General Assembly on children, entitled "A world fit for children", identify the remaining challenges in achieving those goals, and develop a strategic plan for further progress, which is of great importance. On behalf of the Government of the People's Republic of China, I extend our warmest congratulations to this Meeting and thanks to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his report on the follow-up to the special session on children.

Five years ago, heads of State and Government and representatives of States participating in the special session stressed their commitment to fulfilling the goals set out in the Declaration and Plan of Action to enable every child in the world to have equal opportunities for survival, development, protection and participation. Over the past five years, the Government of China has adhered to the principles of putting children first and acting in the best interests of child, strictly abided by the aims and spirit of the special session on children and the United Nations Millennium Summit, earnestly honoured its commitments, and taken concrete actions to implement the national programme of action for child development in China (2001-2010), which has effectively promoted the progress of the children's cause in China.

In promoting children's development, the Government of China has taken a series of positive measures. First, it has formulated and perfected laws, regulations and policies to protect children's legal rights and interests. A complete set of basic laws for protecting children's rights and interests have been put in place in China. Since 2002, China has revised the Constitution, the Law on the Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases, the Law on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests, the Law on Compulsory Education, and the Law on the Protection of Minors. It has formulated policies and regulations on providing basic education to children, home care to orphans, assistance to street children and children living with HIV/AIDS or orphaned by AIDS, and so on. In 2006, China revised the Law on the Protection of Minors in order to reinforce the protection of children.

Secondly, we have strengthened the Government's responsibility in addressing children's needs in order to implement the national programme of action. In line with the global goal of children's development, the Government of China has formulated and implemented a national programme of action for child development in China from 2001 to 2010. Local Governments at the provincial, prefectural/municipal and county/city levels have also formulated plans for children's development. In 2006, for the first time, the central Government and local Governments at various levels incorporated children's development into their overall plans for economic and social development so as to promote the achievement of coordinated development. Governments at all levels have established and improved cross-sectoral cooperation mechanisms for children's development. The national Government has continuously increased its financial allocation to compulsory education in the poor and ethnic-minority regions, assistance to students from poor families, health care for women and infants, and the prevention and control of HIV/AIDS. About 150 million rural students enjoy free compulsory education, and some receive free textbooks and living subsidies. Projects to encourage hospitalized delivery, reduce the maternal mortality rate and eliminate neonatal tetanus have been introduced in the poor areas. For AIDS patients, anti-retroviral medicines are provided free of charge, testing is conducted anonymously, and approaches to preventing mother-to-child transmission of HIV have been adopted.

Thirdly, we conduct regular monitoring and evaluation, and are improving our sex-disaggregated statistics. In response to the programme for children's development from 2001 to 2010, the central and local

Governments have developed a sex-disaggregated monitoring and statistical index system and established a monitoring index database for children's development. In 2006, the Government conducted a midterm evaluation of the implementation of the nation plan of action, which has provided the basis for a follow-up strategy for children's development.

By implementing a series of laws, regulations, policies and measures over the past five years, China has registered further progress and achievements in many aspects of children's development, such as health care, education, the protection of their rights and interests, and gender equality. Children's health and nutritional situation continue to improve, and enrolment and participation in basic education continue to increase. The goals of reducing the mortality rates of infants and children under the age of five and of achieving universal basic education, among others, are all on track or ahead of schedule, and the maternal mortality rate has dropped markedly.

New progress has been made in children's protection. Orphaned, disabled and street children, and children from migrant families, ethnic minorities and poor families are being covered by the protection and assistance. The environment for children's development has been optimized. Children's participation in matters affecting them has been largely assured. We are pleased that a child from China has been selected to attend this Meeting.

We realize that, as a developing country with 341 million children under the age of 18, China still faces many challenges in child development, such as regional disparities and new or emerging issues caused by population migration, the rising rates of birth defects and the gender gap, and the prevention and control of HIV/AIDS. To address those problems, the Government of China will take further action to implement a people-centred, scientific outlook on development, speed up social development focused on improving livelihoods, create an economic and social environment more suitable to the development of children's well-being, continue to enhance the implementation of the national plan of action, strengthen the social security of vulnerable children, and narrow the gap in order to promote coordinated development.

The Government of China would like to reiterate its commitment to sparing no effort to continue to promote children's development. We hope to reach a consensus with all countries at this meeting so as to intensify our ongoing efforts and contributions to build a world fit for children.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Carmen Oliveira, Deputy Minister for the Promotion of the Rights of Children and Adolescents of Brazil.

Ms. Oliveira (Brazil) (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to extend my warmest greetings on behalf of the Government of Brazil and of the more than 1,200 Brazilian representatives who participated in the seventh National Conference on the Rights of Childhood and Youth, held in Brasilia last week. The local preparatory conferences organized in 4,500 cities enjoyed the participation of 300,000 people. The Conference's central theme — "Ensuring the human rights of boys, girls and adolescents: a necessary investment" — was closely related to that of this Commemorative Meeting.

At the opening of the Conference, President Lula reaffirmed his commitment to establishing conditions conducive to Brazil's attaining the Millennium Development Goals. He stressed the objective of changing an economic development model that generates the concentration of wealth and social exclusion, which have historically placed our country among the 10 largest economies in the world, but also among the five countries with the worst distribution of income. Emphasizing the unconditional priority of his Government to fighting poverty, President Lula recognized that the highest interest of boys, girls and adolescents is based on the assurance of social justice and non-discrimination, especially in a country where 43 per cent of boys and girls in early childhood live in poor families.

The implementation of policies since 2003 allowed Brazil in 2006 to attain the lowest indicators of extreme poverty in the past two decades and the best income distribution in the past 25 years. In that period, Brazil experienced the inclusion of more than 11 million families in income-transfer programmes. Moreover, the number of jobs doubled and the minimum wage increased to 26 per cent above the rate of inflation.

The issue of ethnic and racial inequality has also been a priority, as reflected in progress in the legal settlement of more than 10 million hectares for

indigenous populations and people of African descent. Seeking to decrease regional inequalities, the Federal Government, with the support of UNICEF and local Governments, has implemented programmes in the northern and north-eastern regions, where we find the highest concentration of boys, girls and adolescents and the lowest indicators of human and childhood development.

Improvements in the health sector are also promising. In comparison with the previous period, malnutrition rates have been cut by half and child mortality rates have fallen by almost 25 per cent. In addition, a basic health programme has been implemented in 90 per cent of Brazilian cities.

More recently, there has been significant progress in the educational sector, with a tenfold increase in the current budget for basic education, support for full-time schooling, and an expansion in the number of technical schools and in the offer of university allowances for poor students. Five new programmes for the protection of boys, girls and adolescents from violence have been elaborated, including a national policy against sexual violence and the creation of a national system of assistance to adolescents in conflict with the law.

Those programmes have already shown very positive results, such as the reduction by half, in the last decade, of exploitative child labour; the establishment of plans to combat sexual violence in the most vulnerable cities; a decrease in the murder rate of young people, reflecting the adoption of the Disarmament Statute, which has saved thousands of lives.

All the initiatives I have discussed are part of an unprecedented programme, entitled "Plan President — Friend of Children and Adolescents". The programme was elaborated according to the goals of "A world fit for children" and includes 242 measures. The elaboration of annual reports allows for monitoring, with the involvement of some 40 institutions.

Brazil is committed to cooperating with its neighbouring countries in the region within the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR), in particular through the Niñosur initiative, which encompasses 10 countries and has four priorities: combating sexual exploitation, juvenile justice, child labour and early childhood.

On the global level, Brazil will host in 2008 the third World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, in cooperation with national Governments, UNICEF, End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes and other non-governmental organizations.

Two new programmes will further contribute to improving our social indicators. The Growth Acceleration Programme will enable the development of the economy in a more equitable and sustainable manner. Furthermore, the Programme for the Acceleration of Citizenship, together with the Social Programme for Children and Adolescents, will strengthen efforts for social inclusion.

Last but not least, I would like to emphasize the importance we attach to the contributions of children and adolescents, as shown by the fact that adolescents represented 25 per cent of delegates to the last National Conference in Brasilia, with the right to vote and in the same capacity as adults.

In a context in which young people are often criticized for being mere consumers and for their political apathy, we reaffirm now more than ever the need to ensure their right to participate actively in the decision-making process. The recent Brazilian experience has allowed for a rich intergenerational exchange between adults and adolescents, reinvigorating us all. As the Brazilian poet Guimarães Rosa said: "Life is a communal meal, to which each person contributes their seasoning, to better flavour it".

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Mr. Poldej Pintrateep, Deputy Minister of Social Development and Human Security of Thailand.

Mr. Pintrateep (Thailand): First of all, on behalf of the Thai Government, I would like to extend our condolences to the Government of Algeria and the families of the United Nations staff affected by the terrorist attack.

It is a privilege and an honour for me to have this opportunity to address such a remarkable commemorative high-level plenary meeting devoted to the follow-up to the outcome of the special session on children. On behalf of the Thai delegation, Government and people, I would like to express my appreciation to the United Nations for taking a leading role on children's issues.

Since acceding to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1992, the Thai Government has placed a high priority on the implementation of every aspect of the articles of the Convention and on the Convention's optional protocols, to which Thailand acceded in 2006.

I would like to reaffirm Thailand's commitment to all conventions and international instruments that it had signed or acceded to. Regarding the outcome document of the special session on children, "A world fit for children", in 2002, the Cabinet assigned the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security to be responsible for coordinating and crafting the national policy and strategic plans on children's issues. Under the framework of "A world fit for children", for the period from 2007 to 2016, 10,000 children have participated in that policy formulation process, in which their views are included alongside those of representatives from governmental and non-governmental agencies.

The national policy and strategic plan for children's development of Thailand consists of 11 aspects, including four aspects from "A world fit for children". These are in the areas of family and children; child physical and mental health promotion; promotion of child safety and prevention of injury in children; children affected by HIV/AIDS; education for children; children's recreation; children and mass media; culture and religion; the promotion of child participation; the protection of children in need of special protection; and revisions of laws, rules and regulations relating to children.

At the national level, there are 35 organizations implementing 308 programmes and activities. At the provincial level, organizations in 76 provinces have adopted provincial action plans. My Government specifically announced a National Agenda for Children and Youth in January 2007 to support the national plan of action, which emphasizes five areas: creative media appropriate to children, youth and families; creative activities for children and youth; quality day care centres, child development centres and kindergartens; child-friendly provinces; and establishing a specific family law to help protect the family.

To encourage child and youth participation, child and youth councils have been established in 76 provinces and at the national level. In September 2007, the National Assembly approved the Protection of Victims of Violence in the Family Act, which protects everyone in the family, especially children and women. The following month, it approved the Promotion of Child and Youth Development Act, which contributes directly to the promotion of programmes and activities for children and youth at all levels. Last week, the National Assembly approved the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act, which includes the protection of legal and illegal migrant children and women, and imposes heavier penalties on the perpetrators.

In conclusion, I would like to say that Thailand is committed to the well-being of children and their families. In that respect, we are making our country fit for children. We believe that could be best achieved through a bottom-up approach of encouraging and making each family and each community fit for children and accordingly reaching up, from the local level to the provincial, regional and national levels. Cooperation at the regional and international level is equally important in order for countries to share experiences and good practices. I trust that this Meeting will allow us to further learn from one another and work together towards the common goal of a world fit for children.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Gonzalo Arenas, Deputy of Minister of Planning of Chile.

Mr. Arenas (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I would like to express the solidarity of the Government of Chile with the people and the Government of Algeria regarding the cowardly attacks that took place this morning.

"We can say that never before has Chile made such an important and comprehensive effort for children and their mothers". With those words, spoken with pride by President Michelle Bachelet Jeria a few days ago during a gathering with children at La Moneda Palace, I wish to begin my report on the achievements of my country regarding the protection of children and adolescents, who now represent 31 per cent of the approximately 16 million inhabitants of Chile. The achievements in the current situation of children's rights in Chile are reflected in the following areas.

With regard to poverty, over the past 17 years, the country has reduced total and infant poverty by 50 per cent. Indeed, while in 1990, 50.7 per cent of all

children under age 18 lived in poverty, by 2006 that figure had dropped to 21 per cent.

In the area of health, Chile reduced its infant mortality rate from 8.9 per 1,000 live births in 2000 to 7.9 in 2005. Furthermore, a public health reform system has been implemented in stages and is expected to reduce infant mortality and morbidity rates even further.

In the field of education, my country has increased preschool coverage significantly over the past two years of President Bachelet's Government. Our goal is to add 70,000 new available places in day-care services, which would represent an increase of 582 per cent, and 43,000 new slots for the 2 to 4 age group, which would represent a 140 per cent increase, between 2006 and 2010.

We have also promised universal preschool education, which will enable all children to enter school at the age of 4, through the enactment of a constitutional reform, which also increased from 12 to 14 the age until which all Chilean children are guaranteed an education.

In the area of legislative reforms, a series of laws has been enacted in Chile aimed at improving the lives of children and adolescents and guaranteeing the protection of their rights. The following measures are particularly noteworthy: the law aimed at curbing domestic violence; the creation of family tribunals; automatic family allowances throughout pregnancy and until the child is 18 years old; the right to maternity and post-natal leave and an allowance for adoptive mothers and fathers, irrespective of the age of the child adopted.

Beyond those achievements, Chile is facing great challenges, and addressing them is our Government's priority.

There is a marked degree of inequality in Chile, stemming from three factors: socio-economic bracket, geographic location and membership in a given social or ethnic group. Despite certain positive indicators, narrowing the gap between the wealthiest and the poorest is a task that the State of Chile has firmly undertaken, as the inequality in income distribution affects primarily children and adolescents.

In the educational arena, there is disparity in the learning rates of children from different sectors and in access to secondary education.

In compliance with the presidential mandate that gives priority to social protection, a child protection system called "Chile Grows with You" has been established in our country aimed at children and their families, from pregnancy to 4 years of age. "Chile Grows with You" gives children access to universal services and assistance, catering for their needs and enhancing their development. In addition, priority is given to families, and basic conditions are established in the emotional and physical environment in which children grow up so as to promote their comprehensive and harmonious development as they get older. With this system, it is hoped that equal opportunities will be given to all from the earliest age, irrespective of social origin, gender, ethnicity or family configuration, so that every child can develop to the fullest of his or her natural capacity.

The system offers the following benefits, among others: a support programme for bio-psychosocial development in the public health system, from pregnancy until entry into preschool; differentiated support and guarantees for children from the 40 per cent of households with the lowest incomes or who are vulnerable, including a single family subsidy, which is offered throughout pregnancy and which can be maintained until age 18; and free high-quality childcare centres and nursery schools for all children of working mothers, or those seeking work, studying or with special needs. That system is being implemented gradually in our 345 municipalities and will be fully implemented by January 2008.

Furthermore, knowing that family plays an important role in the development of children, we have recently launched a massive information programme with a view to strengthening familial relationships and ties from the beginning of life.

In the area of special protection, Chile promotes and strengthens a national system to protect the rights of children and adolescents who are seriously harmed and to hold those who violate the law accountable, through a joint comprehensive care programme with local governments and private organizations. A total of 961 programmes are being implemented in the areas of preventive assistance, care, protection, redress and the rehabilitation of children and adolescents whose rights have been violated.

With regard to universal protection, care is provided to 36,000 children in low-complexity

situations. For infants and children in situations of medium complexity, 296 regional programmes are offered, which care for 25,825 children and adolescents. For high-complexity cases, there are 560 specialized programmes, which care for 29,967 children and adolescents. The country thus has specific programmes and projects aimed at putting an end to violations of the rights of children and adolescents.

Chile has also made substantial progress in the promotion and strengthening of the technical capacity of the institutions and teams providing assistance to children in individual and family situations of a greater complexity, including the victims of sexual and commercial exploitation and trafficking. More generally speaking, they also look after the victims of child labour, a practice considered dangerous and unacceptable, in accordance with the commitments undertaken in the "A world fit for children" Plan of Action.

In that context, we have created innovative educational programmes such as re-schooling projects for children and adolescents with highly complex psychosocial profiles. That is why State bodies, together with civil society — some of whose representatives are with us in this Hall — are actively participating in the development of specific intersectoral initiatives promoting the sustainability of the actions undertaken and progress towards a comprehensive social policy. Chile has also undertaken ongoing coordination efforts with international bodies such as UNICEF, the International Labour Organization and the International Organization for Migration. Furthermore, the country has strengthened its programmes aimed at protecting the rights of abandoned children likely to be adopted, guaranteeing their right to have an identity and to live within a family by defining appropriate legal, technical and administrative procedures.

As a country, we have made progress in protecting the rights of children and adolescents, thus fulfilling the commitments set out in "A world fit for children" (resolution S-27/2). Moreover, we have boldly implemented a children's social protection system that, in effect, recognizes that inequalities begin at birth and that addressing them in a timely manner is key to our country's development.

Certainly, there are many unresolved issues that the Plan of Action set out in "A world fit for children" requires us to address — for example, the challenge of appropriately addressing the emergence of new problems related to the quality and conditions of children's lives that have a negative impact on their social coexistence. Those problems make it difficult to implement the mechanisms designed to strengthen social cohesion within our country, but we shall not relent in our efforts to achieve such cohesion.

Chile welcomes the report submitted by the independent expert for the United Nations study on violence against children, as well as the Third Committee's recent decision to appoint a Special Representative on Violence against Children.

Finally, as Her Excellency President Michelle Bachelet stated to the General Assembly, "We do not need new commitments; we simply need to fulfil the commitments already made" (*A/62/PV.4, p. 34*). We are concerned that Millennium Development Goals 4 and 5 cannot be achieved. That is why we welcome the launching, on 26 September 2007 in this city, of two important initiatives: the Global Business Plan for Millennium Development Goals 4 and 5 and the campaign Deliver Now for Women and Children, which is coordinated by the World Health Organization and is focused on the achievement of those Goals.

Convinced that the future of children is now, Chile wishes to reaffirm its firm commitment to contributing actively to the promotion and protection of the rights of all children. We shall resolutely take part in all initiatives aimed at ensuring compliance with the international commitments in this area.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Ilkka Oksala, State Secretary, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health of Finland.

Mr. Oksala (Finland): The children and young people of the present are the adults of tomorrow, and their living conditions and resources will be crucially defined by our decision-making today. Thus, our children will receive the resources for life with which we adults are ready to provide them. We adults must also bear that responsibility for all children of the world.

The young representatives who are part of the delegation of Finland want to bring to the attention of the General Assembly the concerns that have arisen when they have discussed the well-being of children and young people and changes in society. Our young

people are concerned about the unequal distribution of welfare. It appears that the welfare of people is being increasingly polarized in our world, which, at the same time, is growing richer and richer. Our young people hope that the negative effects of that polarization can be prevented.

It is easy to share the concerns expressed by our young people. At the global level, Finland has committed itself to eradicating poverty in accordance with the Millennium Development Goals. That objective is an essential element in Finland's development policy, and it is based on respect for human rights, always taking into account children's best interests. From our perspective within Finnish society, it can be stated that the economic development of society has been strong for more than a decade. At the same time, however, there has been a marked trend towards polarization in society with regard to the income of some families. Finland cannot be satisfied with its social development, in which the proportion of children in the lowest income brackets has been increasing, despite favourable economic development.

That favourable economic development has required active participation by everyone in the labour market. In Finland, people are employed outside the home, and both men and women, mothers and fathers, are taking part equally in employment. However, the question arises as to whether the demands of working life have increased too much from the child's point of view. Parents are spending less and less time with their children. There is a similar trend in other countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development as well.

One could even say that children have to compete with work in order to exercise their right to spend time with their parents. That situation cannot be regarded as being in children's best interests. A family's economic well-being does not always guarantee the actual well-being of its children. That is a problem that affects all of us, and we should all work together to try to find various ways to solve it.

Finland has prepared its own national plan of action, "A Finland fit for children". As part of the plan's implementation, a new independent institution, the ombudsman for children, has been established. We would like to join with Sweden in encouraging other countries to consider establishing similar institutions.

As an innovation included in the plan of action, Finland is actively developing methods to evaluate in advance the effects of various social decisions on the lives of children and young people. We in Finland also want to see children and childhood as an investment in our future society.

Finland continues to develop specific models for the assessment of the impact of decisions on children and hopes that other countries will also be involved in this development work. In many countries of the world, economic development has been favourable in recent years. This is a positive trend. But development should not take place on adults' terms only. Increasing economic welfare should also be used nationally for improving the situation of children. We feel that more and more countries can now afford to really focus on this matter.

In accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, every child is entitled to protection by society to the maximum extent of its available resources and to participate in decision-making in society. Development of the methods assessing the child impact of decisions will play a major role in the future. On the basis of the results of such assessments, we will be better able to promote the full implementation of the rights of every child.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Hussain Saeed Al Shaikh, Deputy Minister for Social Affairs of the United Arab Emirates.

Mr. Al Shaikh (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is my pleasure to join fellow participants today at this meeting devoted to reviewing progress in the implementation of the Declaration and the Plan of Action contained in the document entitled "A world fit for children" (resolution S-27/2, annex). I would like to extend, on behalf of the United Arab Emirates, our deep gratitude and appreciation to the President of the General Assembly for his able stewardship of this important meeting. We wish also to thank His Excellency Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his valuable efforts in leading the United Nations towards achieving its desired goals and for his report (A/62/259) on today's subject.

Mr. Soborun (Mauritius), Vice-President, took the Chair.

This gathering, which indicates the international community's resolve to give special priority to children, provides an opportunity to review and evaluate our efforts, recognize difficulties and determine the work that needs to be done before the target year of 2015, which requires collective action to identify the appropriate mechanisms for building a society fit for children.

The Plan of Action for building a world fit for children is based on four main priorities: ensuring and supporting a healthy lifestyle; providing high-quality education; ensuring protection from abuse, exploitation and violence; and fighting HIV. These priorities have been the focus of our attention and have been thoroughly discussed during the events of this special session meeting.

In this context, I would like to reiterate my country's commitment to the Plan and to acting in the best interest of children. I believe that development cannot be achieved without ensuring the fundamental rights of children and providing favourable conditions for their survival, growth and protection.

My country reaffirms its commitment to the pledges taken at the special conferences and summits in the area of development, and on children in particular, and it has signed a number of conventions, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 138, concerning Minimum Age for Admission to Employment, and ILO Convention No. 182, concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour.

In this context, a number of national laws have been enacted, including the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act of 2006, which encompasses all rights stipulated in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Other laws include the Federal Human Trafficking Act, also of 2006, and the Federal Family Act of 2005. The latter constitutes a general framework for the protection of the family, the core of society, and for enabling it to play its leading role in protecting and raising children and in ensuring their welfare. The adoption of an act on children is in progress; this is expected to be an effective instrument in helping the relevant authorities to take the concerns and requirements of children into consideration while developing programmes and plans in their best interest.

As a result of the efforts and programmes being implemented in our country, many indicators associated with children have shown improvement, especially in areas of health, education and protection.

A few days ago, the Government of the United Arab Emirates approved the largest budget in its history, 34.9 billion dirhams, of which 51 per cent was allocated to the social sector, including education, health, labour, social affairs, culture, youth and society development. At least 34 per cent of the social service budget was devoted to the education sector alone, while the 9.2 per cent was allocated to the health sector.

The health sector has achieved higher levels of excellence in the areas of primary and secondary health care, both in preventive and therapeutic aspects, and child health-care levels are now in line with the best international practices. That is why the World Health Organization named Abu Dhabi and Dubai as being among the three healthiest cities in the Middle East region.

As a result of the appropriate and sound health policies implemented in the United Arab Emirates, child and infant mortality indicators have improved, with neonatal and infant mortality rates dropping to 6.87 and 7.7 per 1,000 live births, respectively. The mortality rates of newborn children and children under the age of 5 also declined, to 5.37 and 9.87 per 1,000 live births, respectively.

Our expanded national immunization programme has also made significant progress in covering targeted categories of children, with the percentage of covered children now exceeding 95 per cent. No cases of polio or diphtheria have been recorded since 1990, and no deaths resulting from measles or diarrhoeal diseases were reported. As a result of improved health care for expectant mothers and the high dependency on in-hospital births, which now exceeds 99 per cent, no maternal deaths have been recorded at the perinatal stage during the past 10 years.

With a view to enhancing child health, a mandatory pre-marriage testing programme has been introduced in order to protect children from hereditary diseases. Other programmes such as those for breastfeeding support, the early detection of neonatal

diseases, adolescent health and the accident protection for children under the age of 15, were also introduced. In addition, school health-care services are provided, including a project to promote health in schools and the establishment of unified standards for school meals.

As for the fight against AIDS, our Government has, through its national programme for the control and prevention of AIDS, succeeded in controlling AIDS cases and keeping them at the lowest levels in the world since the programme began in 1985. Thus, AIDS poses no risk to the children of my country.

Due to its importance to the development of children's personalities and to their mental growth, education and education policy development occupy a major place in our national development policy. The Government has taken steps to reorganize primary education, amend the educational structure, develop educational curricula and evaluate the learning achievements of students. In 2006, the Government approved the Future Schools Project, an innovative educational system that responds to the requirements of and aspirations for the future and that is aimed at bringing the quality of our schools up to international standards and graduating students capable of successfully completing their university studies. The project has been implemented in 50 schools at the three levels of education. In reviewing the status of child education, indicators have shown that the female to male enrolment ratio has reached 94.8 per cent in the first level of education, 92.9 in the second level, and 106.7 in secondary education.

There is no doubt that children's needs are not confined to good education and health services. I hope I do not appear to be exaggerating when I say that protecting children from all forms of exploitation, violence and abuse is the third cornerstone of the child's life, giving meaning to his or her existence and ensuring his or her well-being. The United Arab Emirates has therefore given this subject the attention it deserves and has adopted legislation toughening the penalties for crimes against children. This legislation ensures proper conduct by legal guardians responsible for managing a child's life and protecting his or her money and property. We have also regulated the right of custody and alimony for the child in case of separation by the parents. This legislation also provides for special treatment of children who violate the law. In mid-2007 a national institute for protecting women and children from exploitation, violence and abuse was launched in Dubai, providing protection and shelter for abused women and children until all the reasons necessitating such protection are resolved.

The Government of the United Arab Emirates has endeavoured to support development at the regional and international levels, particularly in countries with the fewest resources, through the provision of financial and in-kind assistance. More than 95 countries have benefited from such assistance, which has exceeded $70 billion, mostly in the form of grants.

In view of the direct and indirect impact of education in general, in particular childhood education, on development efforts in developing countries, which represent a major challenge for those countries, the new Dubai Giving Campaign has been launched by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashed Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates and ruler of Dubai. It is aimed at supporting the educational systems of a number of poor countries with a view to bringing hope for the future to children there, thus breaking the vicious cycle of poverty and enabling those children to contribute to the development of their communities and their countries. The campaign reflects the social cohesion and harmony of the United Arab Emirates, irrespective of ethnic and cultural background, and reflects the ability of this international social fabric to participate in making a positive change in the world and in helping its people and communities to achieve the development, progress and overall prosperity they desire. The total amount of donations to the campaign was 1,738,334,807 United Arab Emirates dirhams. A similar grant was given by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashed Al Maktoum, and the campaign thus reached about 3 billion dirhams, equivalent to $1 billion, for the children of the world.

Let us remember: we still have a lot of work to do before we can say that we live in a world fit for children. A great deal needs to be done to save children who die from preventable diseases, who live in hunger or who are denied their fundamental rights to life, health, security and education. There are children who suffer from foreign occupation, violence and armed conflict, or who are forced to enter into early marriage or work in dangerous conditions. Millions of children have been orphaned and made vulnerable because of HIV/AIDS; many of them will never know the meaning of childhood.

Let us work together — Governments, community-based organizations, the business sector and all others interested in children's welfare — to implement the Declaration and Plan of Action of "A world fit for children" — a world that protects children, interacts with their concerns, understands their needs and realizes their aspirations. Let us build a better life for children, where they are treated as an invaluable and inexhaustible resource for the future. We look forward to this future with a new vision and a firm will — a future where we can achieve the childhood we want and where we can find a world fit for children. May God grant us success in that endeavour.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Rita Skjaervik, State Minister, Office of the Prime Minister of Norway, and to Ms. Camilla van Passchen, youth delegate of Norway.

Ms. Skjaervik (Norway): The special session on children in 2002 was crucial in drawing up a road map for strengthening children's rights all over the world. Today, at this important crossroad, five years later, we have the instruments. Now it is time to act. We must ensure that this Meeting will not be just another venue for repeating what we have said before, but that it will actually take the agenda of "A world fit for children" (resolution S-27/2, annex) forward. Failing to invest in children means failing in achieving development. While we are halfway to 2015, we are much less than halfway to achieving most of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The Convention on the Rights of the Child provides a common basis for our efforts. It requires a rights-based approach. Further efforts are needed to integrate children's issues visibly and systematically into general programmes, policies and budgets, as well as into cross-cutting themes. Governments should incorporate the Convention into national legislation on child protection, as Norway has done.

As a direct result of "A world fit for children", Norway established a national plan of action to follow up selected goals relevant for children and young people in Norway, and real progress has been made. This was followed by the Government's Development Strategy for Children and Young People in the South. It builds on a rights-based approach and addresses emerging protection challenges.

Norway recognizes the vital importance of education, not only as a right in itself, but also as a means to improve health, protection, participation and gender equality. Education also promotes the child's possibility of realizing his or her full potential. In 2008, Norway will host a high-level international conference on education for all and will focus on measures to include the many children who are without access to quality education.

In the area of health, Norway, under the leadership of the Prime Minister, is helping to generate renewed international momentum and to mobilize an effective international response through the Global Campaign for the Health MDGs. The aim is to be more effective and better coordinated, to invest more and to ensure that we reach the poorest and the weakest.

My Government has intensified the struggle to end all kinds of violence against children. The Government has recently established a new holistic treatment centre, the so-called Children's House, which will carry out legal investigation, treatment and therapy under the same roof. At the international level, Norway actively supported the groundbreaking United Nations study on violence (see A/61/299). We welcome the Third Committee's endorsement of the proposal for the establishment of a Special Representative of the Secretary-General who would coordinate efforts in close cooperation with UNICEF, the World Health Organization, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the International Labour Organization and others. Furthermore, the 10-year strategic review (A/62/228) of the Machel study on the impact of armed conflict on children provides a special opportunity to deal more effectively with the impact of new conflict patterns on children and adolescents. For Norway, these issues are an integral part of our overall efforts in the area of promoting peace and peacebuilding.

Child participation is probably the least implemented of children's rights worldwide. It deserves special attention by all actors promoting child rights. In Norway, the Ombudsperson for Children has been a key advocate for child participation and child-friendly protection and response mechanisms. We welcome the valuable input from the second international meeting of independent human rights institutions for children, which was convened yesterday, 10 December.

In Norway, there is currently an increasing focus on child participation. This year the first parliamentary hearing for children took place, and several ministers, including the Prime Minister, had to respond to suggestions from a group of adolescents.

I will now hand over to Camilla van Paaschen, member of the Children's Forum, youth representative in our delegation and member of the Youth Council of the Ombudsperson for Children in Norway.

Ms. Van Paschen (Norway): I was born in the same year as the Convention on the Rights of the Child. I belong to the first generation that has grown up with the Convention. Over the past two days I have had the pleasure of sharing experiences with young people from all around the world. The challenges in our lives differ a lot. Nevertheless, we share the need to be protected against violence, and we share the need to be heard in matters that concern us.

Ladies and gentlemen — adults: children are the only true experts on what it is like to be a child. I call on you always to consult us before you make decisions that affect us. Remember that the times are changing. We are young in another way than you were. We live in a different world than you did. For that reason, you should never assume that the challenges today are the same as the ones you faced when you were children.

We have the competence that you need. Our participation will benefit society, not only today, but also in our common future. I hope that our contributions over the past few days will lead to an actual and genuine culture for always consulting children in matters that concern us. We, the young people of the world, insist on being both seen and heard, not only observed. You need our experience, our passion and our honesty.

Finally, I would like to say that in the Children's Forum we have asked many questions. We did not get so many answers today, and we hope that tomorrow will be better.

The Acting President: I now call on Her Excellency Ms. Huynh Thi Nhan, Standing Deputy Minister, Ministry of Labour and Invalids of Viet Nam.

Ms. Huynh Thi Nhan (Viet Nam): First of all, on behalf of the Vietnamese delegation, I would like to express our warmest greetings to the President of the General Assembly. We wish him every success in his noble task of contributing to the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and of the Declaration contained in "A world fit for children" (resolution S-27/2, annex), in the best interests of all the world's children.

Despite various difficulties and challenges in recent years, Viet Nam is making remarkable social and economic gains, largely as a result of sound socio-economic development planning and continued political and security stability. Viet Nam's economy continues to grow rapidly, at an average of 7.5 per cent per year.

In addition to economic development, Viet Nam has placed priority on social development. Over the past five years, the Government of Viet Nam has continued to show its strong commitment and determination by implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child and "A world fit for children". The State has revised and amended many important laws — including the criminal law, the law on the protection, care and education of children, the law on gender equality and the law on HIV/AIDS prevention — and has introduced many strategies, programmes and projects in order to better protect the rights and interests of children.

Furthermore, we have developed and launched our second national action plan for children. Child-related goals and targets have been incorporated into socio-economic development plans from the central to the local level. Viet Nam has been working diligently to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and to implement its own 12 development goals and 32 concrete targets based on the MDGs, including child-related goals.

In actively responding to the commitment to building a world fit for children, Viet Nam has been creating child-friendly environments in schools, the family and society. The campaign "Building communes and wards fit for children" has combined the resources of both the State and society with systematic inter-agency supervision at all levels. At present, 100 per cent of Viet Nam's provinces and cities are implementing that model, and we are doing our utmost to ensure that 70 per cent of all communes and wards are fit for children by 2010.

Thanks to those efforts, Vietnamese children have enjoyed favourable living conditions in a safe and healthy environment. Approximately 96 per cent of children under 6 are entitled to free medical

examinations and treatment at public health care facilities. Ninety per cent of children have been inoculated with six different vaccines. Under-five mortality rates have decreased. Children's enrolment in primary and secondary school has increased. Models of community-based child protection have been implemented nationwide. Favourable conditions have been created for Vietnamese children to express their ideas concerning their lives.

However, Viet Nam continues to be confronted with many difficulties and challenges in the area of child protection and care. Our child malnutrition and birth rates are still high, child trafficking and juvenile delinquency have not yet declined, and drug abuse and HIV/AIDS infection among children are still of concern. Children in remote or mountainous areas continue to live in difficult conditions. Health care and other services for children are still limited. The database on children continues to be lacking. The social worker network does not meet the appropriate requirements, and many social workers lack experience.

Viet Nam has been doing its utmost to implement the MDGs, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and legislation related to "A world fit for children". In the course of that implementation, Viet Nam has profoundly understood that it must bring its internal strength fully into play and continuously improve the apparatus of the State; socialize the work of protecting, caring for and educating children; attach great importance to international cooperation, particularly experience-sharing; and strengthen multilateral and bilateral cooperation in order to achieve those goals, in the best interests of the children of Viet Nam as well as those of the rest of the world.

On behalf of the Government of Viet Nam, I would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere thanks to Governments and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, especially UNICEF, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund, UNESCO, the World Health Organization, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, for their active cooperation with and effective assistance to Viet Nam in the implementation of goals and targets on behalf of our children. Once again, I wish every success to this Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting on children.

The Acting President: I now call on Her Excellency Ms. Yadira Hidalgo, Deputy Minister for Social Protection of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, and to Ms. Karla Cruz and Mr. Orlando Hidalgo, youth delegates of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Ms. Hidalgo (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, in accordance with the provisions of article 78 of our constitution, which states that children and adolescents are full legal persons, and mindful of gender equality, would like to introduce a girl and a boy, Carla and Orlando, who will represent us before the Assembly and present a report by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Ms. Cruz (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): The delegation of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela enthusiastically welcomes the organization of this Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting and is especially pleased to see the participation of children and adolescents from around the world present here. We are the true protagonists of this meeting. We would also like to welcome and thank the other United Nations officials and the representatives of the various delegations present.

I would like to begin by saying that our country has 26.6 million inhabitants, of whom 11 million are children and adolescents. All the activities to guarantee their rights are enshrined in the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the Organic Law for the Protection of the Child and the Adolescent. Between 2002 and 2007, policies were formulated to guarantee the social rights of children, such as health and education, in a universal and equitable fashion, as well as to strengthen their social participation and civic rights.

Likewise, the State of Venezuela has ratified most of the international instruments concerning childhood. It has also enacted a set of laws designed to provide comprehension protection of childhood, including the law for the protection of children and adolescents with respect to the use of the Internet, video games and other multimedia applications; the organic law to combat organized crime; the special law against computer crime; the official standard of the national programme of HIV/AIDS; the law of the social responsibility of radio and television; the organic law on the rights of women to a violence-free life; the

organic law for persons with disabilities; the law for the promotion and protection of breastfeeding; the organic law for the protection of the family and responsible fatherhood and motherhood; the draft law for the protection of people with HIV/AIDS from discrimination; and the draft law for a birth registry, among others.

Concerning the successes of the National Action Plan of "A world fit for children", we can point to the following. In the promotion of a healthy life, overall malnutrition in children under 5 years of age is at a low level of 4.64 per cent, and chronic malnutrition is in a moderate range. This indicates that the country is less than one percentage point away from complying with the established goal and, if the current trend continues, the goal can be reached before 2015.

These achievements are due to the high coverage of meal programmes and nutritional protection programmes, such as soup kitchens, which help 600,000 people, most of whom are children and adolescents. School cafeterias provide meals for children aged 7 to 14. School meals programmes cover 1.4 million pupils and homes which provide comprehensive care for 350,000 children up to age 6.

On the subject of access to sanitation services and drinking water, coverage on a household basis in the urban populations is 92 per cent and at 66 per cent for the rural population. The country has 150 treatment and chlorination plants that guarantee drinking water for 30 million people.

National health policies and programmes have been established for the overall development of children and adolescents. The Barrio Adentro Mission covers roughly 70 per cent of the population in primary care, with 8,533 public clinics where family visits are made and preventive medicine practised. More than 200,000 vaccinations were provided and all types of free medication were supplied, covering 95 per cent of all health problems. Seven public clinics were built, along with 83 comprehensive diagnostic centres, 57 comprehensive rehabilitation centres, four high-technology centres and 1,415 dental clinics.

The first child cardiology hospital was built, which has treated more than 4,000 children and adolescents from Venezuela, Latin America and the Caribbean. The hospital has offered consultation and examination to 80,000 patients each year.

The national vaccination programme has reached more than 90 per cent, with mandatory vaccinations schemes for children. At present, all the population aged 18 to 39 years is being immunized in order to eradicate rubella in the country. The cold chain system was strengthened at the national level and 1,721 permanent vaccination centres were set up in the Barrio Adentro Mission clinics.

Venezuela has a moderate prevalence of tuberculosis whose rate hovers between 25 and 50 cases per 100,000 inhabitants. The goals for HIV/AIDS is to halt and prevent its propagation as well as to expand knowledge. The incidence and prevalence is lower than 0.33 per cent, or between 70,000 and 100,000 cases per year. Currently, there is a prevention campaign underway through town councils, with the assistance of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS.

In terms of access to quality education, in initial education, coverage up to 6 years of age has increased by 3 per cent, thanks to the Simoncito project. Primary education enrolment, for children between 7 and 14 years of age also increased from 4.8 to 4.9 million with an increase of 20 per cent in the tertiary stage due to the expansion of Bolivarian schools, which reduced the number of school drop-outs and increased enrolment by 1.3 million.

The Ribas Mission trained 800,000 new graduates and the Sucre Mission enrolled 350,000 high school graduates. We have also strengthened 239 technical schools, with an enrolment of 189,000 students, and the National Centre for the Teaching of Science has held more than 800 student meetings on the integration of education and work.

Mr. Hidalgo (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): The national Government has increased investment in education through the following strategies: the elimination of fees for public school enrolment; the strengthening of the programme for school meals; the creation of new Bolivarian schools and secondary schools; the implementation of "Morality and Light" programmes; and the guaranteeing of gender equality enshrined in the Constitution and in the educational curriculum. Thanks to the Robinson Mission, which managed to provide literacy training to 1.5 million people, our country is now an illiteracy-free country.

Venezuela guarantees the right to identity at birth through the immediate registration of newborns in hospital registry units, thus guaranteeing them the right to inclusion and to receive the benefits of social, economic and political development.

Venezuela has protected children and adolescents who participate in armed conflict, and this protection has been recognized and enshrined in our Constitution since 1999. In its articles, the Constitution incorporates the proposal found in the Convention of the Rights of the Child and the optional protocol of the Convention of the Rights of the Child on the participation of children in armed conflicts.

Venezuela fights against child labour in many ways. The State applies measures to achieve the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, such as its plan to prevent and eradicate child labour.

Concerning the elimination of trafficking and sexual exploitation of children, Venezuela has ratified the international instruments dealing with this topic and is currently developing a national plan against the trafficking of persons and will apply this national plan to commercial sexual exploitation and child pornography as well. Moreover, we are also implementing a national action plan designed for the comprehensive protection of children and adolescents against violence and exploitation.

We are also implementing programmes to support and strengthen the family. These include guidelines to structure and operate the substitute family programme with the family placement approach, instructions for implementing the Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in respect of Intercountry Adoption, and general guidelines for national adoptions, for the authorization for children and adolescents to travel inside and outside the country and for the protection of children and adolescents before, during and after natural disasters.

Other programmes in support of the family include guidelines to guarantee the right to sport, rest, leisure, play and recreation; and to guarantee the requirement of human rights in the application of protective measures in matters affecting children and adolescents. Also, a bi-national action plan for the comprehensive protection of border children and families is proposed.

In Venezuela we have also established a national commission for the participation of children and adolescents; child parliaments; a children's constituent assembly; children's councils; a network for children and Bolivarian students; the promotion of student organizations in educational centres, beginning at the seventh grade; a national day for the system of overall protection; community councils inspired by local constituents; national meetings of the network of indigenous children and adolescents; youth municipal governments; the first national forum for the protection of human rights and the first meeting of the educational system and the national protection system.

Venezuela is disseminating materials in its schools on the values of peace and tolerance in order to promote and foster coexistence. At the national level we are promoting alternative radio programmes and stations for children and adolescents. Venezuela is promoting youth participation in the decisions of child councils as an expression of community government, with the right to be heard, to vote and to be elected as spokespersons for the various labour committees beginning at the age of 15.

Finally, the President of the Republic, Hugo Rafael Chávez Frías has launched the Music Mission with the participation of more than 300,000 children and adolescents within a system of child and youth orchestras. For the year 2008 we hope to increase that number to 1 million child and adolescent musicians. In fact, the Venezuelan delegation is pleased to be present at this meeting and to share its experience with you, but let us go further and on behalf of the children and adolescents of Venezuela, we offer a gesture of solidarity for the people and the children and adolescents of Algeria.

We want a world fit for children and adolescents, and we are here to demand it.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Paul Richard Ralainirina, Deputy Minister of Health, Family Planning and Social Welfare of Madagascar.

Mr. Ralainirina (Madagascar) (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the Republic of Madagascar I have the honour of addressing the Assembly and conveying the warmest congratulations at this Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting Devoted to the Follow-up to the Outcome of the Special Session on Children of December 2007. I would like to share with the

Assembly, on behalf of the delegation of Madagascar, the progress we have achieved since the special session of the General Assembly on children, held in May 2002 in New York, and especially the challenges we still face to implement the commitments made during the twenty-seventh special session and set forth in the document entitled "A world fit for children".

The Madagascar Action Plan, represents our road map for the next five years and defines the commitments and the challenges to be taken up in various sectors, whereby the Government intends to carry out a quantitative and qualitative step forward, to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

Thus, under the leadership of our President, who has been accelerating the adoption of a results-based approach, we are to optimize effective strategies that will develop innovative steps through decentralization, with community participation and development partnership. Madagascar has made substantial progress in implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In particular, we have seen significant progress in sectors affecting health, education, protection of rights and HIV/AIDS. In terms of health, over the 10 past years, Madagascar has reduced child mortality by more than 30 per cent and we will continue to implement a minimum series of health measures to achieve maximum impact towards the survival of children, especially through designated healthcare weeks for mothers and children that were strongly and fully supported by all of our partners, in particular UNICEF. Furthermore, we recognize our duty to enhance our achievements in terms of nutrition, access to drinking water and a healthy environment in order to advance towards achieving Millennium Development Goals 4 and 7. These achievements must be consolidated.

We have seen good results in family planning, but efforts towards increasing awareness must still be pursued in order to improve the overall situation and the status of women who are pregnant and to reduce undesired pregnancies among young women. We should also ensure access to contraception for all women, including in remote areas. Such project would enable us to rapidly reduce the maternal mortality rate.

In the area of education, Madagascar's Action Plan defines a number of ambitious short- and medium-term objectives. Free education with the distribution of school kits has resulted in a clear increase in the enrolment rate at the primary level, on the basis of gender equality. The positive results of education reform still require harmonization with human resource development strategies and rural infrastructure. In the area of decentralization, the accountability of local administrative authorities through shared leadership should enable us to achieve the objectives of our Action Plan. The continuation of all of these endeavours is an essential element of our policy.

Encouraged at the highest State level, we have set up a commission on reforming the rights of the child, which has enabled us to speed up the establishment of a legal framework and to ensure protection for children. This framework includes laws on adoption, the rights and protection of the child, the minimum age for marriage, trafficking of human beings and a recently adopted law on sexual tourism. Following the recommendations of the study of the Secretary-General on violence against children, a national plan of action has been elaborated and validated. Networks for protecting the rights of the child have been set up at certain sites and the Government intends to expand them.

On the subject of HIV/AIDS, above and beyond the figures indicating its prevalence, the attitude towards the disease by the population is still a challenge. We have adopted a law to protect the rights of persons living with HIV.

The President and his wife themselves have supported heightened awareness for voluntary screening, and we are conducting a comprehensive prevention programme. The prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases is still too high and high-risk behaviours too widespread. We should improve universal access to quality care for AIDS patients and maximize our preventive interventions among vulnerable groups.

In recent years, Madagascar has undertaken reforms to ensure a genuine protective environment for children. We are confident in our pursuit of measures to undertake in the higher interests of children. Attaining a world fit for children is a continuing duty for us all. This presupposes a determined and synergetic commitment on the part of Governments, international institutions and civil society.

Madagascar reaffirms its resolute commitment to the implementation of the Declaration and Plan of

Action of the World Summit for Children and to that of the Convention on the Rights of the Child as we strive to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Marko Štrovs, State Secretary of the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs of Slovenia.

Mr. Štrovs (Slovenia): It is my pleasure and honour again to address the General Assembly on the occasion of this Commemorative High-level Plenary Meeting Devoted to the Follow-up to the Outcome of the Special Session on Children.

Slovenia fully aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by Portugal on behalf of the European Union.

Allow me to first express my appreciation and support to the United Nations and UNICEF for organizing this important event. Furthermore, we commend UNICEF for its steady efforts and its invaluable role in building a better world for children. Child protection is one of Slovenia's priorities in its domestic and foreign policies.

Slovenia has committed itself to the full implementation of the outcome of the special session on children, embodied in the document "A world fit for children". For that reason, the Government of the Republic of Slovenia adopted a programme entitled "Children and Youth 2006-2016".

In Slovenia, economic efforts play an important part in providing greater employment opportunities and welfare. These efforts give rise to solidarity with the poor and social security for all.

In every region, Governments are using intergovernmental mechanisms, to follow up on the special session, including regional consultations on the United Nations study on violence against children (A/61/299). At the national level, an important mechanism for better implementation of the outcome of the special session is the creation of independent human rights institutions for children.

Slovenia has strongly supported the activities of the United Nations in fighting violence against children in all its aspects and has been involved in the preparation of the United Nations study on violence against children. Slovenia was one of the first countries to act as host to United Nations regional consultations on violence against children. We welcome the draft resolution (A/C.3/62/L.24/Rev.1) calling for, inter alia, the appointment of a Special Representative of the Secretary-General to act as a high-profile and independent global advocate to promote the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against children. Furthermore, we expect that, if adopted, such a resolution would consolidate United Nations endeavours in the area of child protection.

On the basis of a broad professional discussion, Slovenia has committed itself to preventing violence in the family and banning corporal punishment of children by preparing a new Act on the Prevention of Violence in the Family. We are implementing the recommendations of the United Nations study presented at the international conference entitled, "Prevention of Violence against Children and Human Security", held in Slovenia in December 2006.

In Slovenia we are fully aware that children's well-being and schooling in all levels, the continuance of their educational path and better employment opportunities are of the greatest importance. This is the best assurance for the prevention of violence. In our country, children from 6 to 15 years of age are enrolled in compulsory primary school, while 90 per cent of young people from 15 to 19 years of age are enrolled in secondary school. Almost 43 per cent of the group between 19 and 24 years of age continue their education tuition free, while the poorest pupils and students are entitled to State scholarships.

Slovenia, along with the entire European Union, reaffirms its commitment to combat AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. It welcomes the activities of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, to which Slovenia has earmarked funds in line with the Millennium Development Goals. We again acknowledge the important work carried out by UNICEF in creating awareness and increased access to information and services for young people.

We intend to pay special attention to the promotion of the rights of the child when we hold the European Union presidency in 2008. The European Union has recently adopted a new set of guidelines on children's rights that will guide our activities in the development of European Union foreign policy in this area.

Allow me to conclude by saying that all children have the right to a healthy and secure childhood. Only

consensus and partnership among Governments, international organizations and civil society, as well as the participation of children at different levels, can ensure the effective implementation of the proposed solutions. Today's event offers just such an opportunity.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Gyula Tarcsi, State Secretary, Ministry of Social Affairs of Hungary.

Mr. Tarcsi (Hungary): The Republic of Hungary was one of the very first to join the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Declaration of "A world fit for children", and we devote high priority to the United Nations Millennium Declaration. Our country makes every effort to realize the objectives of those documents.

Although our country is among the developed countries gauged by its per capita gross domestic product, the elaboration of the Millennium Development Goals was of great importance to us. The changes in our political and economic lives after 1989 generated challenges and tasks that correspond to the objectives of the Millennium Declaration. These include, primarily, the struggle against and prevention of poverty of children and families with children; ensuring the highest level of physical and mental well-being of children; and making quality education accessible for everyone.

In the meantime, we must also face challenges that are typical of developed countries, including an ageing population, a decline in the number of births and the mainstreaming of environmental concerns. We pay special attention to reducing inequality in opportunities in order to solve those complex problems, including through the reduction of gender-based wage differences; the improvement of the financial opportunities of those living in socially disadvantaged areas; and the provision of a fair present and future for our children.

As for that last objective, we place special emphasis on the treatment and prevention of violence against children, including domestic violence, peer violence or violence in the media, and on preventing children from becoming criminals and victims. Since 2000, the reduction and prevention of drug use has been a priority Government task. In that context, allow me to inform the Assembly that Hungary plans to ratify the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, possibly during the first half of 2008.

Since 2000, the parliament and Government of the Republic of Hungary have adopted several short- and long-term strategies, programmes and action plans based on these instruments for the protection of children and youth. The Government has also filed reports with the parliament every year since 1995 on the situation and the development of the living conditions of children and youth, as well as on measures the government has taken relating to these living conditions, and has provided reports every year since 2000 on actions taken to reduce the drug problem. The Parliament of Hungary adopted the National Strategy on Social Crime Prevention in 2003 and two-year action plans have been prepared ever since.

Three of the Government's five main priorities relate in a concrete manner to children. A National Health Programme for Infants and Children of the Republic of Hungary was prepared in cooperation with the European Office of the World Health Organization. In addition, a National Programme against Children's Poverty, adopted in 2007, contains short- and long-term objectives and an action programme, to help in a substantial way to reduce and prevent child poverty in Hungary.

In aligning Hungary with the statement of the European Union, allow me to assure the Assembly that the Government of Hungary is committed to supporting the efforts of the international community to enable the present and future of our children to actually be "A world fit for children". In order to lend more credibility to my words, allow me to inform you that I intend to sign an agreement with UNICEF leaders tomorrow, on behalf of my Government, in which we commit ourselves to financially supporting this agency.

The results of complex programmes become visible only later and, in the meantime, we must face many new challenges. However, difficulties may only be overcome if we continually keep our objectives in mind and do not consider our children as vulnerable little ones who cause problems, but rather as investments or indeed, opportunities for the future. It is up to us to shape the future of our children, and let us not forget that they shape ours as well. We must take further steps to ensure the rights of children and we must admit that our work will be more efficient and

effective when we involve them in the decision-making processes on issues that affect them. Therefore, I think it is especially important that during the Children's Forum, held recently, the interested parties were given the opportunity to present their opinions.

Finally, I wish the Assembly further success in its work, hoping that all that we say here will contribute to the implementation of the Declaration adopted in 2002, with a view to the tasks still ahead of us, as indicated in the documents submitted by the Secretary-General.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Andriy Musiyenko, Deputy Minister of Health of Ukraine.

Mr. Musiyenko (Ukraine) (*spoke in Russian*): At the outset, Ukraine would like to align itself with the statement made by the delegation of Portugal on behalf of the European Union. We would also like to touch on some issues that are of special importance to our country.

Unanimously adopted in May 2002, the outcome document of the General Assembly's special session on children, "A world fit for children", committed Member States, including Ukraine, to special obligations in the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is therefore very important to discuss the implementation process of that document, evaluate the progress made, consider the problems that have been identified and solve them.

The protection of children is an overall national strategic priority for Ukraine. The President and Government of Ukraine devote special attention to activities in the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In that connection, bearing in mind the Millennium Development Goals and the strategy of the outcome document, "A world fit for children", Ukraine has identified priority areas for activities in establishing favourable conditions in the lives and for the development of children in health care and the formation of a healthy lifestyle; combating HIV/AIDS; ensuring that children receive a quality education; protecting children from abuse, violence and exploitation; fighting the phenomenon of latchkey and street children; and overcoming poverty.

In order to achieve those goals, the State policy of Ukraine in this area for 2000 to 2007 has been designed to improve the juridical basis for protecting children, reforming the State system for caring for orphans and neglected children, enhancing social protection for poor families with children, developing a network of institutions working for the interests of children, enhancing the intersectoral cooperation of State authorities, enhancing the interaction of social organizations, improving State care in protecting children from violence and exploitation, and fighting HIV/AIDS.

Significant efforts have been made to achieve a host of Government reforms designed to improve health and establish favourable conditions for the lives and upbringing of children. As part of the activities, special attention has been given to the active integration of State policy into the formation of a healthy lifestyle for children and youth. Thanks to changes in legislation in Ukraine, a set of practical steps has been introduced to protect the rights of children, and there are certain positive changes in birth and mortality rates, through separate indices for child morbidity and maternal deaths.

The fight against HIV/AIDS is an important area in implementing at the national level the outcome document of the Assembly's special session on children. A basis for the strategy for fighting the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Ukraine is a comprehensive approach to solving the problem, set forth in a national programme to ensure the prevention of HIV infection and assistance to people with HIV and AIDS in the 2004-2008 period. We are carrying out a number of intersectoral and sectoral programmes designed to prevent the transmission of HIV from mother to child and to ensure medical and social assistance for HIV/AIDS-infected children. Unfortunately, in spite of all of those efforts the spread of HIV/AIDS in Ukraine is still of serious concern.

The Government of Ukraine is giving great attention to ensuring opportunities for children to receive a quality education. Existing legislation provides full mandatory secondary education free of charge and for all pupils at the lower grades to be given free meals.

Our country believes that it is extremely important to ensure that children are protected from abuse, violence and exploitation. Children in Ukraine have the right to protection against all forms of family violence, and work is under way to prevent or overcome the neglect of children. The social protection of children is regulated by a Ukrainian law on

preventing family violence. The State provides the necessary help in preventing and exposing instances of cruelty to children and provides information on such instances for investigation by police dealing with the affairs of minors so that measures to stop the violence can be taken. In questions of protection from abuse, violence and exploitation, our country is actively cooperating with international organizations.

Ukraine considers the overcoming of child neglect and abandonment a priority task. The Government has established a programme for that purpose for the years 2006 to 2010, which sets out measures to prevent children being deprived of families and to provide a broader family environment for orphans and children without parental protection and an improved network of institutions for the social protection of children. Support for national adoption of the decision by the President and Government of Ukraine has been a strategic goal. In January 2005, a Ukrainian law was adopted to ensure a legal basis for the social protection of orphans and neglected children, and it has been implemented to secure a family environment for the children.

One of the key tasks of social and economic development in Ukraine is reducing the level of poverty. With a view to reducing the overall level of poverty, in 2001 a national strategy to combat poverty was adopted, along with a comprehensive programme to ensure its implementation, designed for the period to 2009. In particular, from 2001 to 2006, assistance was increased in accordance with the Ukrainian law on State aid to families with children, for instance, a one-time allowance at the birth of a child, help with child-rearing until the child reaches the age of 3, and help for single mothers and foster children.

Despite the successes in the implementation of the outcome document of the special session on children, the agenda still contains a number of problems requiring solutions. First and foremost is combating poverty, improving financial measures to improve the status of children, including their education and medical care, and social institutions that prevent the spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Further efforts are needed to improve the legislation to fully combat child neglect and abandonment and to effectively combat child trafficking, child prostitution and child pornography, and to strengthen the role of parents in bringing up their own children and to further develop a social system to help those in orphanages who find themselves in a crisis situation.

With a view to solving the many problems and in order to further implement the plan of action of "A world fit for children" and the Millennium Development Goals, the Government of Ukraine has developed a new document that defines a State strategy to protect children — the national action plan for the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, for the period to the year 2016. In accordance with that document, the Government's policy priority areas in the near future will be preventing HIV/AIDS, increasing access to quality education, fighting child neglect and abandonment, protecting orphans and neglected children, developing social services for children and families with children, and increasing activities at the local level to improve the status of children.

In conclusion, allow me once again to state the commitment of Ukraine to achieving the noble goals of the plan of action of "A world fit for children", of the Assembly's special session on children, and to meeting the requirements of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Our country intends to continue to give necessary assistance to activities at the national level and to make its contribution to regional, international and global efforts in this area.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Yana Marečková, Deputy Minister and Director of the Human Rights Section of the Office of the Government of the Czech Republic.

Ms. Marečková (Czech Republic): It is a great honour for me to speak on behalf of the Czech Republic on this occasion and to address this Assembly. It is very satisfying to see how many delegates have gathered here to acknowledge again the importance of children's rights and to reaffirm their commitment to build a world fit for children. I would like to use this opportunity to share with you our experience in achieving the goals of the special session on children.

At the international level, the commitment of the Czech Republic to protect the rights of children has been expressed by ratification of new international instruments, including the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict and the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture

and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Further, the Czech Republic is preparing its ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol.

At the national level, a number of important legislative and non-legislative measures have been taken in recent years. I would like to mention, for example, the law strengthening the social and legal protection of children, the law strengthening the protection of victims of domestic violence and the new education act. In many areas the Government adopted detailed policy documents, such as on the conception of care for endangered children and children living outside their own family, the National Action Plan on the Fight against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, the National Action Plan for the Prevention of Children's Injuries, the National Programme for the Fight Against HIV/AIDS, and the Action Plan of Social Inclusion.

In June 2007, the Government adopted a new comprehensive policy on children and young people for 2007 to 2013. This document includes, inter alia, the cross-cutting themes from the declaration on "A world fit for children", ensuring first of all children's participation, healthy lives in a peaceful, multicultural society and the protection of the rights of children. The Government intends to involve representatives of regions, NGOs, schools and experts in the implementation of the policy. The main objective of the policy is to establish appropriate conditions particularly for the fulfilment of the family function, for the personal development of children and their education towards active citizenship, including participation of children in social and political life, support of healthy lifestyles and protection against negative phenomena.

As for the protection of the rights of children, the main objective of the Government policy is to fully implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to evaluate its implementation on a regular basis. In respect of the participation of children in social and political life, the objective is to establish conditions for wide involvement of the young generation in public and social life, to support the formation of children's self-governing bodies and to encourage State and regional administrative bodies to extend and intensify mutual communication with children and their organizations. As far as children's health is concerned, the objective of the Government's policy is to support health prevention measures, to acquaint children with health risks and to help them develop skills important for maintaining and strengthening health.

Finally, the document also covers the area of children and sociopathological disorders, social prevention and integration. The objective of the Government's policy in this area is to systematically support all preventive activities and to help increase children's social competencies. The tasks resulting from this policy will be implemented by the relevant ministries. Concrete measures will be specified in plans of action for two-year periods. All ministries involved in implementing the policy will present an overview of their specific tasks and measures for each two-year period, together with an evaluation of their implementation. We believe that the comprehensive policy document and the subsequent two-year plans of action, together with other national measures, will contribute to the improvement of children's well-being in the Czech Republic.

The Acting President: I now call on Her Excellency Ms. Giva Roselyn Dete, Under-Secretary for Child Welfare of Zimbabwe.

Ms. Dete (Zimbabwe): Before my address, my delegation wishes to express its sincere condolences to the United Nations and to the families that lost their loved ones in the explosions that struck Algeria this morning.

It is with great pleasure that I address the General Assembly. Indeed, children are every nation's tomorrow and future. It is in recognition of that fact that Zimbabwe is among 155 countries that have developed national programmes of action for children to ensure coordinated implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. I am pleased to report the progress that Zimbabwe has made in its efforts to uphold the rights of the Zimbabwean child and, in the process, to build a Zimbabwe that is truly fit for its children.

In the promotion of healthy lives, Zimbabwe has scored tremendous successes in the reduction of child mortality, in spite of enormous challenges that include HIV and AIDS. The under-5 mortality rate decreased from 102 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1999 to 82 in 2005-2006. The infant mortality rate was reduced from

65 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1999 to 60 in 2005-2006. In immunization and vitamin A supplementation, Zimbabwe has achieved almost universal coverage. And today, more than three quarters of Zimbabwean households have access to safe drinking water.

In the provision of education, Zimbabwe has made tremendous strides and has achieved universal access to primary education as well as gender equality. In 2006, 97 per cent of children were enrolled in primary education, and the net enrolment rates for boys and girls are now equal. In the field of early childhood education and care, the implementation of the new policy popularly known in Zimbabwe as the "zero grade" has started to bear fruit, as reflected in the increase in the proportion of grade one children attending preschool from 49 per cent in 2002 to 64 per cent in 2006. The policy has established early childhood education as part of every primary school, and the teachers of the zero grade are qualified, having undergone a three-year training programme.

In the area of protecting children against abuse, exploitation and violence, Zimbabwe has continued to strengthen the policy and legal framework in support of the protection of children's rights. The recent adoption of the Domestic Violence Act in 2007 strengthens the country's resolve to protect its children from violence and abuse in the home. In October 2007, the Anti-Domestic Violence Council was established to spearhead the implementation of the Act under the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Gender and Community Development.

Zimbabwe has always had a robust birth registration process. The latest demographic and health survey found that 74 per cent of children registered their births in Zimbabwe in 2005-2006.

Poverty, however, has remained a major challenge for Zimbabwe. As a result, some of our children have had to work and live on the streets. However, there are efforts in place to address that issue. For example, the city of Harare and authorities in other major cities have established task forces to move children from the streets to places of safety where they can be cared for.

In combating HIV and AIDS, Zimbabwe has taken a lead in the Southern Africa region. The adult HIV and AIDS prevalence rate was 24.6 per cent in 2003, and recent surveys and antenatal care surveillance data indicate that it has dropped to 15.6 per cent in 2007. The scale of the pandemic, however, is still overwhelming. In Zimbabwe, an estimated 1.1 million adults are currently living with HIV and AIDS, 60 per cent of whom are women. Furthermore, an estimated 133,000 children are infected. Overall, more than one in seven Zimbabweans are infected, but only approximately 40 per cent of children have access to antiretroviral treatment. Tremendous gains have been made in expanding services related to the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV (PMTCT) throughout the country, with more than 500 sites providing comprehensive PMTCT services by 2006.

However, one of the greatest challenges is the estimated 1.3 million children who are orphaned in Zimbabwe, the vast majority of them as a result of HIV and AIDS. Those children are less likely than non-orphans to attend school and to have access to health care and other basic services. They are also more likely to have psychological problems and to be subjected to forced sex in adolescence, which increases their vulnerability to HIV.

In response, the Government has developed an innovative Programme of Support for the implementation of its National Action Plan for Orphans and other Vulnerable Children. Under the Programme, funds from various stakeholders are pooled which are used to finance civil society interventions aimed at supporting the country's most vulnerable children. Over the next three years, the Programme of Support is expected to benefit 400,000 Zimbabwean orphans and other vulnerable children.

These efforts to combat the effects of HIV and AIDS still require support from the international community, including critical support from the Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria. It is sad, however, that Zimbabwe could not be considered for Round 7 of the Global Fund, because that would have enabled us to make much more progress in reducing the suffering of our people caused by the pandemic.

With regard to malaria control, the number of people suffering from malaria was reduced from 1.8 million in 2004 to approximately 1 million in 2006, which amounts to a 40 per cent reduction in the number of malaria cases. In the 17 malaria-prone districts in Zimbabwe, more than 80 per cent of pregnant women and under-5 children have been

provided with treated mosquito nets and preventive medication.

However, in spite of those successes, Zimbabwe still has a lot of work to do in fulfilling its obligation to uphold the rights of all its children. Zimbabwe needs to continue empowering communities, families and children themselves to uphold those rights.

Nevertheless, the illegal sanctions against Zimbabwe and the isolation of our country have hurt the Zimbabwean child the hardest, particularly in the areas of nutrition, adequate medication for opportunistic infections, paediatric antiretroviral therapies, antimalarial drugs and poverty reduction in general. We therefore appeal to all those who love children, particularly members of the Assembly and the international community, to support our country in its efforts to build a Zimbabwe that is truly fit for its children.

The Acting President: I now call on Her Excellency Ms. Antonia Popplewell, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Social Development of Trinidad and Tobago.

Ms. Popplewell (Trinidad and Tobago): The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago is pleased to be part of this high-level plenary meeting on children and expresses its support for the ongoing efforts of the United Nations in the protection and promotion of the rights of children. In 2002, Trinidad and Tobago joined other Member States in supporting the outcome document "A world fit for children" (resolution S-27/2), thus reaffirming our commitment to improving the lives of our children.

At the country level, Trinidad and Tobago has gone a step further by developing its own Vision 2020 plan, aimed at achieving developed-nation status by the year 2020. The Vision is built around five developmental pillars, the most pertinent of which, in this context, is nurturing a caring society, thus emphasizing the importance of the family as the foundation of a healthy society.

We are pleased to share with the Assembly some of the policies that we have put in place to facilitate the implementation of "A world fit for children". In 2006, Trinidad and Tobago completed its second National Plan of Action for Children, which serves as a framework for the implementation of the four priority areas of action outlined in "A world fit for children". Our revised national sport and youth policies provide a framework for particular strategies and actions aimed at the attainment of the objectives outlined in the outcome document. The Caribbean Youth Dialogue 2006 provided valuable resolutions that have been included in the expanded youth response of the Trinidad and Tobago National Strategic Plan for HIV/AIDS.

In addressing the issue of quality education, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has embarked on reform of the education system. Measures taken thus far include the following. We have adopted policies, plans and programmes for a restructured and decentralized education system from early childhood to adult education. We have established several new units to strengthen the school support services system. We have adopted the programme of the United States Agency for International Development "Centre of Excellence in Teacher Training" to improve reading levels through in-service teacher development and classroom intervention. We have reviewed the revised Education Act in order to, inter alia, ensure that a rights-based approach to education is reflected.

Early breastfeeding is now promoted at some of our regional hospitals, in compliance with UNICEF's Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative. Comprehensive antenatal services are provided routinely and free of charge at public maternal and child health clinics throughout the country. Health screening services for the early detection of hearing and visual impairment among students enrolled in Government and assisted primary schools have been provided since October 2005.

A review of the children's legislation package has also recently been completed. The package is intended to bring children's legislation more into line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and to provide a cohesive strategy for increased protection of the nation's children under the law.

Deliberate efforts have been made to expand and improve family support programmes providing social assistance and other forms of material support of which children are both direct and indirect beneficiaries. In addition, emphasis has been placed on expanding counselling services for children in need of special protection, strengthening intersectoral partnerships and raising awareness of children's rights.

Despite the progress made to date, there have been challenges in the areas of human resource

availability, relevant training, facilities and service provision. In an attempt to address some of those constraints, we plan to increase the human and material resources and services in key social sector ministries and to promote special education through teacher training and other training programmes. The enactment of children's legislation remains a priority on the Government's agenda. We also intend to continue our efforts to educate the public on children's rights. With support from UNICEF, we recently completed the 2006 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, the findings of which are encouraging, particularly in the areas of poverty reduction, education, water and sanitation and HIV/AIDS management.

We in Trinidad and Tobago will continue to work steadfastly in our resolve to improve the experience of childhood for our nation's children. In closing, the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago once again expresses its thanks for the opportunity to address this high-level plenary meeting on children. Trinidad and Tobago reaffirms its commitment to promote and protect the best interests of all our children as we strive to create a world fit for children.

The meeting rose at 9.10 p.m.